



# VET reform challenges for the teaching profession: a lifelong learning perspective

## Introduction

Industrialised societies are increasingly developing from an industry-based to a knowledge-based economy, in which the nature of work is changing, shifting away from occupations rooted in industrial production to occupations associated with knowledge and information. This shift has changed the type of knowledge required: specific knowledge, which supports the ability to act, is becoming more important than classical scientific knowledge. As a consequence, not only the EU but also individual countries and trans-national organisations like the OECD, the World Bank and Unesco have embraced the need increasingly to invest in education and training. Two documents in particular have emphasised this development. The EU Memorandum on lifelong learning made clear to all Member States the long-term importance of education and training as a human resource to make Europe a more competitive force in the world. But it was the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study that really put education on the political agenda. Following the shockwave generated by PISA, especially in the OECD States that showed up relatively badly, countless proposals for reform were published. Most of them, however, failed to go far enough, in that they took no account of the paradigm shift that had already begun in those countries that PISA had rated highly (such as Canada and New Zealand) and had produced its first positive results. That paradigm shift is summarised in the words 'lifelong learning'. To that extent, the EU Memorandum appeared at the right time.

Admittedly, we are at an early stage of discovering the implications of lifelong learning for VET reform, albeit at a stage that seems to represent a breakthrough in how

we think about permanent learning in changing times. On the one side there are socioeconomic forces for countries to invest in education and training infrastructure to keep up with the increased international competition, and for individuals to learn more and more often new subjects targeted at functional adaptation to maintain their own earnings. On the other side, the development towards a knowledge society opens up opportunities for personal development in such a way that the individual can actively participate in the change process and in shaping new perspectives in economic and working life.

The part played by teachers (and trainers) in this formative process is regarded as essential, with the result that both individual countries and international organisations show an awareness of the need to change the perception and profile of the teaching profession (<sup>1</sup>). Teachers' roles have become more complex, calling for greater self-confidence, dialogue abilities and creative capabilities in their work. The tasks of teachers are no longer limited to classroom work, but comprise school development activities and cooperation with regional stakeholders.

The new roles and tasks demand changes in VET teacher capabilities. It is the character of these changes that they cannot be seen as a once-and-for-all-time change. They require learning throughout teachers' professional careers. But neither is it always and only formal learning that is necessary, nor are other people always the right ones to take the choice of what to learn. Therefore, it is no longer enough any more for teachers to be sent by their principals to external courses in teacher training institutions; teachers need to be experts in their own learning career; they need to learn how to learn.



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**The article addresses key challenges for the teaching profession, and corresponding institutions, to secure a prominent role in a VET reform, which is devoted to a lifelong learning perspective. These challenges may apply to EU countries but draw on the author's work in transition countries. The article clarifies the difficulties for vocational education and training to incorporate lifelong learning as a guiding theme. It then refers to fragmented teacher education approaches to new teacher tasks, which are no longer limited to classroom work, but comprise school development activities and cooperation with regional stakeholders. It discusses the new role of the vocational institution within the frame of lifelong learning. The article ends with the discussion of the complex interaction between policy and practice of vocational education and training reform.**

(<sup>1</sup>) By 'teaching profession' in VET we essentially mean all individuals (teachers, teacher educators, trainers in enterprises, practical instructors, assistant teachers, facilitators, supervisors), who play a coaching, mentoring, teaching, training or supervising role in the learning process. Teacher and trainer training is the lifelong learning process of the teaching profession. It can be formal, non-formal and informal. It includes education (pre-service/initial), training/retraining/updating (in-service/continuing) of the teaching profession in public and private institutions. Training occurs on all matters, which influence the learning process of the individual, such as subjects, teaching and learning methods, pedagogical/psychological/organisational approaches, theories and practices.



## The new perspective

The central message of lifelong learning for any educational system is that the individual learner is at stake and has to be taken seriously. Up to now, vocational education and training has been oriented in a quite different direction: it was more about forgetting his/her individuality and learning to function in an unambiguous and reliable way within a very often hierarchical context. This is why it is proving so difficult for VET to incorporate lifelong learning as a guiding theme. For some time, however, there have been serious attempts to develop a different approach to VET, in which the learner is seen much more as an 'entrepreneur': someone who has an idea, pursues it independently and aims to carry it through to success. In contrast to the traditional concept of VET, lifelong learning relies on the learner's individual potential. Releasing that potential and transforming it so that the learner is able to implement his/her ideas, is the central aim of lifelong learning. The individual, by acting entrepreneurially, does not simply follow instructions given to him by the teacher or trainer. The main focus is on his or the learning group's own ideas, which they try to put into practice. They must be able to assess the consequences of their own acts and, where differences of opinion arise, be able to defend and correct their own point of view confidently. Lifelong learning can only develop where a high degree of freedom exists amid conditions that are rich in context and situation. The issue is no longer the simple process of acting out a prescribed role or carrying out a given task, but planning one's own activity in a context of new challenges.

This is why self-organised project learning (idea generation, refinement, planning, implementation, and evaluation) is one of the key didactic principles; students work on an idea or a problem of immediate interest and relevance to them. This type of learning means a break with working on the basis of traditional subject or discipline orientation, as there is always a view to illustrating a larger and more essential area of reality. In this way students are able to generalise their insight and utilise it in other, new contexts.

Project orientation is not only oriented towards student learning. Any member of an organisation undergoes learning processes

that are essential when working with organisational and personal development.

## A detour on competence

The concept of competence is gaining popularity within the new VET orientation. Learners have to develop skills within their own contexts and they have to be given opportunities actively to steer their own development. In precise terms, 'competence' is the overall individual ability to act in uncertain and complex situations within a given context. Competence has to be manifested by performance, which is the result of professional practice. Practice can only occur where there is a setting in which professional activity is carried out. Within the world of dependent work, this is normally the organisation of a company or a public institution. Competence, therefore, is characterised by actions of an individual in varying working situations within a given organisational context. This understanding of competence highlights the role both of the individual learner and of the company/institution in developing the professional ability of the individual. From this perspective, the organisation takes on an important role in socialising professionalism and building professional identities.

This concept of competence should not be confused with a reductive and narrow perception, where overall competence is broken down into elements of single competencies mobilised by the individual in defined and recurrent situations. Competencies are thus (mis-)understood as micro-units of isolated abilities and a person's professionalism is reduced to a set of (often Tayloristic) features (Homs, 1997).

## Practice-oriented teacher education

If we consider the career paths and positions of traditionally educated vocational school teachers, we form the impression that they are constantly 'falling between two stools'. They pass through school and university education, but they have virtually no contact with the VET system for which they are to work. And when they then begin working as vocational school teachers, they are teaching students with whose future working circumstances (the organisational forms and working methods of undertakings) they are unfamiliar. This situation is unacceptable.



As a rule, the education of vocational student teachers (where it exists) is rather fragmented and not practice-oriented. They acquire years of specialist know-how in disciplines such as mechanical engineering, electrical engineering or business administration, and far too little emphasis is placed on the central work of teachers, namely teaching. For example, key subjects such as group and project teaching, student assessments, learning development reports, analysis of everyday teacher conduct, are not offered by any institution. Teachers are not qualified to become experts in teaching and learning. There is a flagrant divergence between the content of teacher education and the actual job requirements of vocational school teachers. There are no suitable arrangements between specialised branches of knowledge and teaching practice, with practical training in school being intensively supported and cooperation allowed to develop between the university and the vocational school. One reason for this is the fact that teacher education is subordinated to the faculties geared to the traditionally specialised branches of knowledge, and therefore spread over a number of specialities. Another reason is that the university teachers teaching future vocational school teachers have generally neither ever been vocational school teachers themselves nor ever had anything to do with the jobs which the vocational school students seek to obtain. That is why educating for vocational school teachers, which is in line with modern standards, requires new centres, including the reorganisation of teacher education, as well as a new outlook on the part of the university teachers who educate student teachers, with emphasis on the competences which effectively improve the quality of vocational schools, their teachers and principals (Jansen, 2002).

For lifelong learning, the university/college is just one approach to learning among many others that can be listed in a VET teacher's CV. Universities and colleges should, therefore, develop a new view of themselves, which would involve the realisation by universities/colleges that:

□ initial education of student teachers no longer represents total teacher education but is only the entry phase of a multi-stage learning sequence; this greatly reduces the learning pressure on student teachers, since there are institutions for subsequent continuous education and training which are better equipped for certain subjects;

□ student teachers will not be able to acquire the necessary competence solely through exposure to the teaching content and methods offered by universities/colleges. The greater the demands - both from students to develop their individual abilities and from vocational schools that have turned into learning organisations and opened up to the working world - for a teacher competence, which is learned mainly from dealing with practical situations (in the classroom/school/regional environment), the more initial education for student teachers, will become insufficient.

A first conclusion that may be drawn is that training vocational student teachers should be much more closely involved with the real working world - both their own and the one their students will experience in the future. Educating student teachers in universities and colleges must, therefore, start by providing practical stages reflecting vocational school and working conditions. Second, the curriculum for student teachers must be more accurately geared to the problems, practices and prospects of an effective vocational school. This would also be a first, and important, contribution to overcoming the tiresome theory/practice dichotomy in the vocational schools. In terms of a lifelong learning perspective, the received model, which still applies (this teacher teaches theory, that instructor trains practice, and the student is left to relate one to the other), is neither contemporary nor forward looking.

If this kind of practical orientation is to be securely anchored in student teacher education, it makes sense to introduce a programme, comprising two component parts. In vocational schools, experienced teachers with the right personal aptitude would be trained as mentors. Each mentor would then be assigned from one to three student teachers for a period of several months. The general aim would be to develop teaching skills. The student teachers, individually, would have to set themselves very personalised learning targets, which they would then pursue consistently in the course of their practical programme. It would not be the mentor alone who verifies whether the targets were being achieved; the student teachers themselves would also monitor their own progress.

The second component would be for the university and college to enter into partnerships with undertakings in the region, so



that each student teacher has the opportunity to spend several months doing practical work in a company. This kind of partnership would not only benefit the student, who thus gains practical understanding of undertakings' organisational procedures, but would also enable the undertaking to take advantage of the student's acquired pedagogical knowledge to further its own training tasks.

### **Independently responsible vocational institution**

The ability of VET to play a crucial role in lifelong learning of the individuals depends on whether its VET institutions respond to change - if they are able to develop a central position in their region, as more 'open' organisations serving a wide range of interests and a broad clientele. It critically depends first on whether teachers are prepared to incorporate complex reforms into their daily work. A main challenge for reforming VET, therefore, is to choose an approach where VET reform and the human resource development of teachers complement each other. Policy-makers need to ensure that the investment made in teachers is sufficient and proportionate to the demands placed on them. Not only teacher qualifications must be adequate, but also their salaries and working conditions must be sufficiently competitive to motivate them to carry the reform process to success.

A second prerequisite of VET reform following the paradigm of lifelong learning is that policy-makers have to promote greater self-responsibility and self-organisation among VET institutions. This can only succeed in the long term if the main responsibility for VET processes is no longer confined to central administration, but is increasingly transferred to the vocational schools directly involved, and to their directors, teachers and students themselves. They have to introduce the management principle of 'assumption of responsibility', so that they can adopt the policies necessary to deal with the problems and challenges that arise, without having to go through complex administrative procedures. Central administration has to depart from its present practice of planning educational paths precisely in advance and organising the funding of VET institutions down to the smallest detail. Instead, as far as the curriculum is concerned, it should provide no more than the framework of a syllabus, while funding would have to be provided

on a lump-sum basis in accordance with a predetermined code. The structure of the syllabus and the appropriation of the funds should largely be left to the schools themselves. The schools will have to make sensible use of this greater independence, in both internal and external relations.

### **Independence in external relations**

The external development of VET schools will challenge the traditional separation of functions between schools and work. In EU countries, models are rapidly coming into existence, which not only stress the learning partnership between schools and companies on an individual basis, but also take care of fostering a business culture in the region, which brings together VET-institutions and universities, SME-centres, job centres, chambers, etc. in a functioning network.

In order to integrate this approach into vocational education and training, VET institutions will have to abandon their previous function as straightforward initial training facilities and evolve into 'regional competence centres' (see e.g. the new VET law of the Netherlands, which explicitly mentions 'regional training centres', but also the efforts of the Ministry of Education of the German Land Schleswig-Holstein to introduce such centres) that include different types of learners at all stages in their lives. Apart from compulsory vocational education for young students, these centres would have a share in the market as private suppliers. They would provide individuals and companies in the regions with advisory, development services and training. The centres would be a hybrid between a public and private supplier, between formal and non-formal learning, between youth and adult training, between supply for individual learners and for SMEs or other companies, and between supply for employees and employers.

The best way to ensure this is for them to become more involved in cooperative projects with institutions that provide a source of comprehensive knowledge (universities and research facilities) and detailed, practical and empirical knowledge of entrepreneurship (small business development agencies), with the assistance of which they can engage in innovative activities. An innovation strategy of this kind would incorporate built-in teacher training, as the teachers would





be required constantly to adapt to the changing requirements of their clientele. These activities would simultaneously have 'spillover' effects on initial VET.

### **Leadership and change agent teams**

The traditional bureaucratic and hierarchical organisational structures of the VET institutions are counterproductive to the innovation requirements described. One identifiable avenue of change is the prudent reduction of those structures, and the simultaneous reorientation of the entire school staff. The aims of the change include greater scope for discretion and enterprising action on the part of the school management and increased independent responsibility, teamwork and public contact for the teaching staff.

These changes undoubtedly frame a new context for leadership. Traditional leadership is, above all, aimed at control. The principal's main role is that of a generic manager for personnel, finance and budgeting, legal and public information functions and dealing with scheduling, reporting, handling relations with authorities, and overcoming crises and special situations in their schools. Sometimes, principals additionally see themselves as instructional leaders, extending their positional power to influence directly classroom curriculum and teaching/learning processes.

In modern VET institutions, the principal also has managerial functions. But there are important changes: the scope of her/his functions is much more related to overall school performance. A first consequence is that, to be able to dismiss incompetent principals, the principal's contract is not lifelong but, initially, lasts for only five to seven years, after which she/he has to be reappointed. Second, the principal has greater responsibilities and rights. She/he is responsible for the school's budget as a whole, exerts an influence on recruitment, and decides on promotions and bonuses to reward exceptional performance by their teachers. She/he can also dismiss unsuitable teachers, provided that a transparent procedure is in place (Rolff, 2002a).

Any leadership approach has its history; each developed in a context of organisational and broader social goals, needs, norms, ideas, and expectations. Control-driven leadership develops within a supply-oriented school organisation. The principal fulfils the require-

ments of the state rather than serving the individualised demands of its clients and societal stakeholders. As a consequence, the supply-driven organisation manages work according to the principles of routine and standardisation, which gives certainty to the school.

But neither the style nor the type of leadership described would fit the new context of a demand-driven school organisation. 'Commitment' strategies, or 'control', are called for. School staff has to be supported to understand the reasons for change; their commitment to developing, trying out and refining new practices should be fostered. That means principals have to widen their strategic view and increasingly focus on organisational goals to change and so view increased capacity for change as one of their central outcomes. This type of leadership, which could be called 'transformational', is especially attuned to the influence of organisational structure and culture on the meaning people associate with their work and their willingness to risk change (Leithwood et al., 2002).

There is an emergent strategy, which has been employed in recent ETF projects, to support the culture building process in the VET institution by a so-called change agent team (CAT - comprising selected teachers from within the school organisation). An important role of the CAT is to call attention to the importance of social resources in the school and to establish a climate which encourages managers and staff to act in enterprising ways. Teachers are therefore no longer confined exclusively to their own subjects and their own classes but work closely together with their colleagues and the undertakings in their region. The teachers in a collective effort permanently assess (analyse and interpret) their context with the labour market in the region and adjust their practice. They spend time with the participating undertakings and sit in on their colleagues' classes, automatically exchange ideas and give feedback about their work, set six-monthly targets, develop indicators for successful training, etc., and so make their work a matter of public record.

### **Learning organisation**

As we have seen, the paradigm of lifelong learning presents the VET institution with challenges in two dimensions, external and internal. On the external dimension it forces



the VET institution to deinstitutionalise its organisation to serve a much broader clientele with a wide range of interests. Internally, and within this new context, the VET institution has to reorganise itself in a way that changing is considered an ordinary activity rather than an extraordinary one. These different types of changes permanently require significant new individual and collective learning on the part of the principal, teachers and administrators. To achieve this, the VET institution should be reconstructed as a 'learning organisation'. What has been said about self-organisation by students also holds true for the VET institution as a learning organisation. The self-organising VET institution amounts to a project, in which the entire staff comes together to determine the organisational conditions that enable them to take advantage of the idea-generating and problem-solving capacities of each of their members.

Having said this, we should be aware that the term 'learning organisation' consists of two words that do not seem to suit each other well at first glance. In bringing them together both of them will change their traditional meaning. Learning will lose its formal structure and has to integrate all other aspects of learning: non-formal and informal ones, tacit and everyday knowledge, attitudes and experiences. It becomes an unavoidably untidy and protracted process, in which differences, conflicts, emotions, etc. have to be reflected to construct new understandings and further develop one's repertoire of practice. But this will only happen if the principal and the CAT, together with the entire staff, are able to establish a structure in which an effective collaborative culture can grow; one in which teachers feel comfortable exchanging their individual ideas, where experimentation is not only tolerated but desired and where making mistakes is embedded in true interaction.

Within a setting like a VET institution, the term 'organisation' is - according to organisation theory - 'over-determined': on the one hand there are ambiguous and contested goals, on the other, uncertain techniques or procedures for accomplishing their goals. The members of the organisation must take account of multiple legitimate stakeholders when establishing their goals and procedures. In case of a VET institution, they include, for example, social partners and

other members of the regional working world, political and education authorities, universities, special interest groups and, last but not least, students, teachers and trainers. They must negotiate what they will do and forge agreements on what changes will be made. This is a highly political and interpretative process.

### Evaluation

In order to be able continually to improve their performance, VET institutions need a feedback system which can be empirically implemented, and on the results of which their future development can be based. For lifelong learning it is important that such an evaluation encourages the VET institution's own development in a professional and self-confident manner, and that the school's aim is to conduct an open and effective evaluation.

Any evaluation system should take into account both the improvement of the VET institution's internal organisation and its external environment, meaning its improved response to local/regional needs. It is also important that such an evaluation system not only reflects the opinions of those directly concerned at the VET institution, but also of those who professionally support the school and those to whom the school is accountable. The VET institution, social partners, the teacher training institution and the school's education authority should co-operate in the evaluation.

Evaluation is a component of the quality cycle management of the VET institution, which, if successfully done, moves in an upward spiral. Planning, implementation, evaluation, reflection and corrective measures follow each other continually and it is not always easy to distinguish between them. But the crystal point of any quality development is the VET institution's programme. It consists of a list of common values, challenges and objectives, an action plan and evaluation measures, which has been agreed upon for a limited period of time. In the end, the programme becomes the measure on which the development of the VET institution has to be evaluated.

A type of evaluation, which appears increasingly to be gaining acceptance in Europe, is based on quality indicators and consists of an internal (self-evaluation) and external



evaluation. It is important that the external evaluation be based on the same principles, quality indicators and terms as the school's self-evaluation. The school's self-evaluation should, accordingly, be organised by the change-agent team, while the external evaluation is generally carried out by the VET institution's education authority.

Since each evaluation is time-consuming, it is impossible for a VET institution to conduct a comprehensive self-evaluation on an annual basis. It must therefore indicate the main points, which vary from year to year. For one thing, the findings of a school's self-evaluation are for the school itself and need not always be published. The VET institution needs a protected testing ground, which allows it to take risks.

The external evaluation is conducted every few years, for example every five years. The major aim of the external evaluation is to enhance the positive effects of the self-evaluation. The external evaluation group's functions are: to verify the content of the self-evaluation report, to give recommendations on areas that could be further developed, and to provide an opportunity for dialogue between evaluators and 'evaluatees' that will strengthen the self-knowledge developed during the self-evaluation process. The findings of the external evaluation are published (Schratz et al., 2000; Rolff, 2002b).

### **The role of the teacher training institution (TTI)**

According to the new concept of the VET institution as a learning organisation a main role of the TTI should be its contribution to developing school enterprise capacity through a continuously supportive process that stimulates and empowers schools (principals and teachers) to acquire the necessary competences based on their own reflections, experiences, values and understanding. Capacity building for VET institutions includes the professional development of individual teachers, focusing not only on expertise and pedagogical know-how but increasingly on the understanding of technology as a new feature of professionalism in teaching and training. It requires an understanding of the pedagogical potential of technology and the ability to integrate it into teaching strategies.

But teacher professionalism cannot only be seen as an individual competence as it neglects key conditions of teachers' work. The TTI should be aware of the fact that teacher and trainer training is more likely to enhance the development of teachers and trainers, if it includes the objective that teachers and trainers should function as part of a learning organisation. The ability to cooperate in a team is an essential part of this attribute but teams of teachers are still rare. Single subject and age groups exist only loosely together as, currently, school organisation does not require collaboration. The quality of a school, therefore, is defined in an additive way: as the sum of single teachers' work and not as the synergy of the whole school. To overcome this, the TTI should initiate and facilitate site-specific and site-generated team-working projects, i.e. geared to the specific circumstances of individual schools and the teachers and trainers working in them.

Another main task for the TTI is networking. The TTI may be said to have a similar role to the CAT, but intervening at a higher level: what the CAT is for the individual school, the TTI is for the CATs. The links between the CATs is not only a question of interaction but of learning together. Each school's boundaries normally exclude everything that does not fit in or support its own mode and activity. To reach a state where joint work and creation between CATs could be possible, requires changes in their interaction. A learning partnership between the CATs, which the teacher training institution has to establish and support, can be a useful tool in ensuring that the CATs will learn from each other by developing joint activities on common topics.

The TTI should also follow cooperation between the VET institutions and the companies and support the establishment of regional partnerships between them. It should organise workshops on topics of common interest such as:

- ❑ designing and implementing ICT supported learning;
- ❑ structural problems in setting-up local partnerships between VET institutions and companies;
- ❑ pathways and bridges for individual teachers in the context of lifelong learning.



### Support and accountability by the education authority

Although the Ministry of Education and regional authorities provide relevant conditions for developing VET institutions, by far the largest number and most influential elements outside the VET institution are associated with the education authority. Traditionally, this supervising body has the power to prescribe necessary measures for quality development and assurance of 'its' schools. But, for a learning organisation, each single school must decide on its own how it will assimilate these interventions. What the education authority has to learn is that the school, the principals, teachers and administrative staff are the key to quality and that it can only initiate and support their further development. This new understanding will affect its leadership function with regard to the schools.

In general, the new leadership requirements for VET institutions also apply for the education authority. Its leadership has to loosen its 'control' functions and increasingly integrate functions that widen their strategic view and focus on 'commitment' strategies to foster organisational learning in VET institutions. The following points should be mentioned:

- the vision and mission of the education authority has to engender this sense of commitment;
- participation in its decisions and delegation of decision making to VET institutions is a *sine qua non* for organisational learning of VET institutions;
- the education authority has to foster a collaborative culture and an interactive learning environment between the VET institutions.

But support of, and participation by, schools and the teaching profession is one side of the coin; the other has to do with transparency in the school, information for stakeholders about what happens in schools and self-confidence in the teaching profession, being unafraid of benchmarking its own school achievements with regional, national or international indicators. It is important that the education authority makes every effort to qualify principals and teachers in developing and implementing school

programmes and their internal and external evaluation. Only if the teaching profession recognises evaluation as the other side of individual autonomy, a basic of lifelong learning, does it achieve full understanding of what can be called the 'professionalism of teachers'.

Overall, two fundamental professional commitments should make the education authority's system work: the authority's commitment to support and its sensible use of accountability measures to bring VET institutions to qualitatively higher learning organisation levels for the benefit of their teachers, clients and stakeholders (Fink and Resnick, 2001).

### Policy reform and school practice

Having addressed key challenges for the teaching profession (and its corresponding institutions) aiming for a prominent VET reform role, focused on lifelong learning, we should not forget to mention the challenges of implementing the reform process itself. Formulating reform implementation according to the central message of lifelong learning (see paragraph 2) is helpful in making sense of the complex interaction between policy and practice in VET reform.

In many countries formulating VET policy is seen as a prestigious task, reserved for those with high status, contrasting with the much less prestigious implementation. This fact has been strengthened by the conviction that there is an inherent inertia and resistance of the teaching profession to change and that, therefore, change is only to happen when decisions are in the hands of policy-makers. Consequently, change has usually been viewed by teachers as something 'done to' them as opposed to something 'done with' them, which, of course, has not supported the commitment of the teaching staff.

Policy-oriented VET reform generally aims to modernise the organisational framework of VET and bring it in line with labour market needs. The key question for policy-makers is how to get there and, for most of them, the answer is more coherent and ambitious policy. They view government as their chief vehicle and, therefore, mainly focus on two areas: creating new policy instruments that seem necessary to enact reform, and reducing the inherited tangles of regulation, bureau-





cracy and incoherent governance that would impede it. If such VET reform includes the aim to change teaching, policy instruments normally contain measures such as standards that define clear and useful learning outcomes for all students, teacher training to improve enactment of the new standards, and assessment procedures aligned with the new standards.

Policy-oriented reform tends to view schools as an 'engine' to achieve results and not as human organisations with their own structural and cultural rules. Accordingly, it assumes that schools are driven by relatively homogenous activities that can be 'fuelled' by a small set of easily accessible policy instruments. But that remains conjecture, for there is little evidence of a direct and powerful relationship between governmental policy and institutional practice in schools. Experience shows that schools are highly complex institutions driven by a context-specific mixture of interrelated rules, values and beliefs. Learning culture, school organisation, leadership, academic knowledge, professional values and relationships between teachers, collaboration and consultation with the regional environment, etc. are all ingredients of school and teaching practice. And practice is a category which, by definition, is full of (unexpected) situations, driven by both the continuities of the past and the uncertainties of the future. Change unfolds in rather messy ways through the interaction of individuals in settings, where tradition conflicts with creativity. Changing one element of practice creates unpredictable reactions of other elements and of the whole school. Moreover, if several schools are included in the change process, the result may differ from school to school.

Policy-oriented reform has to admit that the question: 'What drives the reform?' might be the right one from the policy point of view, but may not be sufficient from the point of view of school practice. People create practice and, therefore, the question should be: 'Who drives the reform?' With regard to the school it critically depends on whether the principal and teachers are committed to managing the changes that should take place in and outside the VET institution, and to incorporating complex reform measures into their daily practice. A lot depends on whether they are supported in taking ownership of those change measures which directly affect their professional and personal

life. Policy reform tends to neglect this view; it favours a hierarchical sense of the reform context, for instance, in the description of different intervention levels (classroom, school, region, state) or in interpreting events at higher (political) levels of the reform context as more important to success than those at local level. Moreover, policy-oriented reform tends to place a premium on a top-down management and to assume an ordered sequence of activities. Significantly, the actions are segregated and ordered in a hierarchical way: policy-makers at the top of the hierarchy make plans while the people down the chain are more or less relegated to carrying out the plans, completing the predetermined goals and objectives of the agents of systemic reform. Evaluating the results, the systemic reform perspective tends to see local variation in implementation as problematic, that is, an unfavourable interruption to the designed reform process (Cohen, 1995).

The overarching reason for neglecting the teaching profession in VET reform is the traditional policy view on managing reform (a set of technical requirements such as introducing national VET law, curriculum regulations, financing schemes, etc.). The policy function tradition is keeping reform management largely in the hands of policy specialists at national level and focusing on consistent procedures. It seeks to assure compliance with the standards and regulations established centrally. Another view on managing people in VET reform, the so-called human resource aspect, looks at reforms from the angle of social skills to be required to create and maintain a successfully functioning set of relationships within the reform community. The balance of these two, the policy and human resource management approach, is at the heart of the debate on the nature of managing reform processes. The human resource management view is associated with a more responsive approach, placing responsibility and authority for change at the location where change is needed: the individual organisation. It emphasises the need for commitment rather than mere compliance. It is also assumed that to achieve this, all stakeholders will need to be involved, not just policy specialists. The management of people becomes of central strategic importance and the focus moves from compliance with policy to embedding and empowering all human beings involved in the change process, motivating them to be-



come change agents and giving them ownership. To achieve this, policy-makers have to become part of a 'learning community' that implements a project, in which specific project goals and methods are made concrete over time by the participants involved. Negotiation, flexibility and adjustment on the part of practitioners and policy-makers are key to the success and sustainability of any school related implementation.

### Summary

A lifelong learning perspective demands new ways of thinking about the role and tasks of the teaching profession in VET reform. We have indicated main challenges that will most likely result but much remains to be learned about the actual process of implementation. Understanding the aspects of future VET reforms is important, if we are to develop measures that could help our partner countries to find their ways to set up modern VET systems.

Our findings can be summarised as follows:

1. The ability of the VET system to play a crucial role in lifelong learning for individuals depends on whether:

□ teachers are prepared to incorporate complex reform measures into their daily work; whether not just teacher qualifications are adequate, but also their salaries and working conditions are sufficiently competitive to motivate them to carry through reform successfully;

□ VET institutions respond to change: if they are able to develop a central position in their regions, as more 'open' organisations serving a wide range of interests and a broad clientele.

2. The central message of lifelong learning is that the individual learner is at stake and has to be taken seriously. Within this new VET orientation the concept of competence is gaining ground: teachers and learners have to develop skills within their own contexts and they have to be given opportunities actively to steer their own development.

3. Universities and colleges, which educate student teachers, have to realise that student teachers will not be able to acquire the necessary competence solely through

exposure to the teaching content and methods offered by them. The greater the demands - both from students to develop their individual abilities and from VET institutions that have turned into learning organisations - for a teacher competence which is learned mainly from dealing with practical situations (in the classroom/school/regional environment), the more initial education, will become insufficient.

4. Essential prerequisites of the paradigm of lifelong learning include promoting independent initiative, independent responsibility and self-organisation in VET institutions. This can only succeed in the long term if the main responsibility for the VET processes is no longer confined to the central administration, but is increasingly transferred to the VET institutions themselves. Central administration has to depart from its present practice of planning educational paths precisely in advance and organising the funding of VET institutions down to the smallest detail. Instead, as far as the curriculum is concerned, it should provide no more than the framework of a syllabus, while funding should have to be provided on a lump-sum basis in accordance with a predetermined code.

VET institutions will have to abandon their previous function as straightforward initial training facilities and evolve into 'regional competence centres' that include different types of learner throughout life. Apart from compulsory vocational education for young students, these centres would have a share in the market as private suppliers. They should provide individuals and companies in the regions with advisory, development services and training. The centres would be a hybrid between a public and private supplier, between formal and non-formal learning, between youth and adult training, between supply for individual learners and for SMEs or other companies, between supply for employees and employers.

For the purposes of the innovative restructuring described, a new type of leadership, which could be called 'transformational', is required for VET institutions, especially attuned to the influence of organisational structure and culture on the meaning people associate with their work and their willingness to risk change.

There is an emergent strategy to support the



culture-building process in VET institutions by a so-called change agent team. An important role of the CAT is to call attention to the importance of social resources in the school and to establish a climate, which encourages managers and staff to act in enterprising ways.

VET institutions need a feedback system which can be implemented empirically, and on the results of which their future development can be based. For lifelong learning it is important that such an evaluation encourages the school's own development in a professional and self-confident manner, and that the school's aim is to conduct an open and effective evaluation. In Europe, a type of evaluation, which appears increasingly to be gaining acceptance, is based on quality indicators and consists of an internal (self-evaluation) and external evaluation.

5. According to the new concept of VET institution as a learning organisation the new role of the teacher training institution should be its contribution to developing school ca-

capacity through a continuously supportive process that stimulates and empowers schools (principals and teachers) to acquire the necessary competences, based on their own reflections, experiences, values and understanding.

6. The new leadership requirements for VET institutions also apply for the education authority. Its leadership has to loosen its 'control' functions and increasingly to integrate functions that widen their strategic view and focus on 'commitment' strategies that foster organisational learning in VET institutions.

7. According to lifelong learning principles, school reform should be understood as an enterprising learning event by all people involved in the change process. The participants constitute a learning community that develops a project, in which they themselves make specific project goals and methods concrete over time. Negotiation, flexibility and adjustment on the part of both the agents of policy and of practice are keys to the success and sustainability of any school related approach.

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## Key words

Lifelong learning (LLL), enterprise learning, school development, teacher education and training, learning organisation, institutional reform.



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# The French Vocational *Baccalauréat* Diploma: space of a plural transition for the youth



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## Introduction

Until the vocational *baccalauréat* diploma was created, the French hierarchical educational system rested on strong structuring dualisms: on one hand, the opposition between general and technological education, and vocational education; and on the other hand, the opposition between short and long studies. At the secondary level of education, the general *baccalauréat*, considered prestigious, welcomed students who were to focus on higher education. At the opposite extreme, the vocational *Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle* (CAP) and the *Brevet d'Études Professionnelles* (BEP) were considered as the route of relegation and exclusion, reinforcing negative characteristics in students encountering learning difficulties. But since the creation of the vocational *baccalauréat*, this structure has been modified (see appendix). This vocational *baccalauréat* must offer students who failed in general education a path for continuing their studies or catching up through options that are socially more prestigious. As a result, this programme could play an important, if not determining, role in schooling for young people excluded in the battle against academic failure. But do young people excluded from the elite track find in this option, as Alice lost in Wonderland, a chance to create their own pathway? Some 20 years after its creation (1985) we could question whether this diploma has fulfilled its objectives. This paper will not attempt to answer this question but will focus on an additional important aspect: has the vocational *baccalauréat* programme contributed to innovation and opinion changes in French initial secondary education? More precisely, has the social perception of vocational education changed since this *baccalauréat* was created? A Leonardo da Vinci project entitled Analysis and comparison of social rep-

resentations of VET in different European countries (VET-Cultures) suggested that for students, this vocational education programme seems to be a space, time and period for a plural transition: from failure to success, from weak self-esteem to self-confidence, from dependence to autonomy, from childhood to adulthood, from school to work. In this paper, we analyse some of those transitions, occurring mainly during the student period, via case-studies examining the dynamic of social representation of VET.

A victim of the role that the institution itself has forced it to play, vocational education and training in France has always seemed a negative and exclusive model in the eyes of the public at large (Pelpel and Troger, 1993) until, perhaps, the arrival of a new vocational diploma: the French vocational *baccalauréat* diploma. Created in 1985, this new diploma, undertaken in two years after an initial period of vocational training and allowing immediate entry into working life, was not only intended to attest to skills adapted to the new technological demands and changes in work organisation but also to renew interest in VET. Now, 20 years after its creation, it could be questioned whether this diploma has met its original goals. The aim of this paper is more modest, raising the issue of whether the vocational *baccalauréat* programme has contributed to innovation and opinion changes in French initial secondary education. More precisely, has the social representation of vocational education changed since this *baccalauréat* was created?

From different studies (Marquette, Mériot and Kirsch, 1994), the vocational *baccalauréat* seems to be an interesting success. Even though it does not lead to well-established recognition in the occupational field concerned, and while the companies making

**The French secondary hierarchical educational system resting upon strong structuring dualisms, has been modified by the creation of the vocational baccalauréat. This aims at offering students who failed in general education a path for continuing their studies or catching up through tracks that are socially more prestigious. Some 20 years after its creation, do students find in this diploma a chance to create their own pathway? Has it changed the social perception of vocational education and training (VET)? From our research, this track seems to be, for students, a space, time and period for a plural transition: from failure to success, from weak self-esteem to self-confidence, from dependence to autonomy, from childhood to adulthood, from school to work. Using case-studies, we analyse the diverse transitions occurring, mainly during the school period, through the dynamic of social representation of VET.**